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BY- MCCORMACK, WILLIAM

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THIS PAPER ATTEMPTS TO ANALYZE THE SOCIAL CAUSES FOR THE DIFFERENTIAL RATE OF CHANGE IN LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR BETWEEN BRAHMINS AND NON-BRAHMINS. INDICATIONS ARE THAT (1) INDIAN SPEECH COMMUNITIES ARE CONSCIOUS OF CASTE DIALECTS, (2) LINGUISTIC FORMS DIFFUSE MORE RAPIDLY AMONG LOWER-STATUS GROUPS, (3) THE SPEECH OF LOWER-STATUS GROUPS DISPLAYS FORMS WITH WIDER REGIONAL DISPERSTION THAN DOES THE SPEECH OF LOCALLY HIGH-STATUS CASTES, AND (4) THE MOTIVATION, OR CAUSE, FOR THE EXISTENCE OF CASTE DIALECTS IS PROVIDED BY THE SOCIAL-STATUS ASPECTS OF THE LOCAL CASTE HIERARCHY ITSELF. (LP)

ED003912

A CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF CASTE DIALECTS

by William McCormack[1]

A study completed by the author of this paper in 1958 outlined three speech strata in the Kannada spoken in Dharwar, Mysore State (McCormack, 1960). These strata were labeled Brahmin, non-Brahmin, and Harijan, after the caste groups that characteristically use their defining features, chiefly certain verbal suffixes and stems. A contemporary paper on Bangalore Kannada, by William Bright, described greater conservatism in the phonology and grammar of a Brahmin dialect than of a non-Brahmin dialect (Bright, 1960). Conservatism, or, rather, an apparent conservatism--since more rapid change is associated with non-Brahmin dialects in the same localities--is also a feature of the Dharwar Brahmin dialect. This paper attempts to analyze the social causes for the differential rate of change in language behavior as between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, and it reasons that the underlying cause for it and for the presence of caste dialects generally is the same, in that this cause is ultimately the local caste hierarchy itself.

The present analysis is based on data from the speech of 52 women residents in Dharwar in the summer of 1963. The Department of Social Anthropology and Social Welfare of The Karnatak University had completed a census of Dharwar households in April, 1963, and from this the author drew a random sample of every hundredth household for this language study. A woman from each of these households, usually the wife but in two cases a daughter, was presented with eleven original drawings of Indian socio-cultural situations and one photograph of a temple gate, and was asked to describe their content in her normal style of Kannada speech. The responses

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were recorded on tape by two Indian students,[2] who also elicited replies to a brief questionnaire including data on the caste and sect of the respondent, her age, the occupation of the household head, the places of origin of husband and wife, and the languages known and the publications read in the household. The total random sample ultimately decreased by about 40 per cent, since some families contained no women, others had removed from the city in the preceding months, still others were not Kannada-speaking, and some were unwilling to cooperate.

The final sample included 12 texts each from 14 Brahmin women, belonging to four subcastes, and 38 non-Brahmin women, belonging to eighteen subcastes. Most heavily represented in the Brahmin group was the Vaishnava Brahmin subcaste, with ten respondents, and most numerous among the non-Brahmin subcastes were the Lingayat Panchamsali, with seven respondents, and the Valmiky, with four respondents. Two of the Brahmin women had originated in Karwar and Belgaum districts, respectively, while ten of the non-Brahmins were also from districts other than Dharwar, chiefly Belgaum. No respondent was from any district south of the Tungabhadra River. The average age of Brahmin respondents was 30.4 years, and of non-Brahmins, 33.3 years. The figures for white-collar occupation of household head were 57 per cent for Brahmin women and 37 per cent for

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2 The author wishes to express his appreciation to Marion Diengdoh Pugh, M.A., M.A. (Allahabad, Chicago), who collected and transcribed the Kannada texts for this study, and to Shri R. S. Hiremath and Shrimati Suneela Ramaswamy of Dharwar, who assisted her.

non-Brahmins.[3]

The 624 taped texts first were scored for selected "marker traits" that were known to the author to represent deviations from dialect forms expectable from a person of the caste group of the respondent. Sixteen traits were scored in all, but the texts were divided into Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups at the outset, so that only eight traits were scored per group. Of the total sixteen traits, twelve were "paired," in the sense that the non-Brahmin's use of a Brahmin form such as ed$^{\partial}$ was scored, and a Brahmin's use of the non-Brahmin equivalent, ayti, likewise was scored. The six pairs among the marker traits were the following: ed$^{\partial}$/ayti, -oLage/-aaga, -likke/-aak, -oo/-aa, kuut-/kunt-, koo-/kont- (see Table 1). The remaining four traits were not paired: hoNT- and -aara were scored as deviations for the Brahmins, and -ir- (in verbal compounds) and -o were scored as deviations for non-Brahmins. In the statistical treatment, the two "unpaired" traits for each group were merged into a single paired category labeled "Other," the basis for inclusion in this category being that the true other member of the pair did not occur as a deviation in any of the texts.

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[3]The small size of the Brahmin sample, the fact that the student assistants who collected the texts were not Brahmins, and the conservatism of the Brahmins may lead us to question the representativeness of the Brahmin part of the sample. A hypothesis that selection did indeed operate to depress the true population values is the more likely in that the linguistic variability within the Brahmin group turned out to be less than among non-Brahmins, a difference in variability which by the table for values of F (variance ratio) yielded P=.02, i.e., a probability of 2 per 100 that so large a difference between the two groups would occur by chance. For the purpose of the F test, "score" was defined as the number of deviations (i.e., of occurrences of marker traits) divided by a length ratio to make long and short texts comparable to each other. For computation of the F or variance ratio, it was assumed that the traits measured were normally distributed(McNemar, 1949, p.235). In the comparison of variances the definitinn formula, or $F=s^2_1/s^2_2$, was followed, and the table of F values was entered with F=3.5 and n_1=37, n_2=13. The variance estimate, s, was in each case computed from the formula $s=\sqrt{\Sigma(X-\bar{X})^2/N-1}$, after making the substitution $\Sigma(X-\bar{X})^2=\Sigma X^2-(\Sigma X)^2/N$ suggested by McNemar (1949, p. 222).

TABLE 1

REGIONAL AND SOCIAL DISPERSION OF MARKER TRAITS

Grammatical Meaning	Brahmin*		Non-Brahmin	
	Dharwar	Bangalore	Dharwar	Bangalore
It is	ede	ide	ayti	ayti
Inside.....	-oLage	-alli	-aaga	-aaga
Infinitive.....	-likke	-ook	-aak	-aak
Participle.....	-oo	-oo	-aa	-aa
Sit.....	kuut-	kuut-	kunt-	kunt-
Reflexive.....	koo-	koo-	kont-	kont-
Go.....	hoog-	hoog-	hoNT- (and hok-)	(h)ek-
Even though.....	-aadru	-aadru	-aara	-aara
Verbal compound.....	-ir-	-ir-	(absent)	(absent)
Indefinite.....	-o	-o	-a	-a

*All the forms characteristic of Brahmins, save -ook, can be described as "literary," i.e., occurring normally in the written language. None of the non-Brahmin forms are in the same sense literary.

A causal interpretation--namely, that variation from expectable language behavior in the Brahmin group induces change in the speech of non-Brahmins--was suggested when the scores for the six pairs of traits plus the two "Other" categories were arranged in a 2 (column) by 7 (row) table to compare the total frequencies of deviations as between the Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups. Frequency comparisons of the row entries under the columns in this table yielded $P=.001$, by the chi square test for significance, which indicated that the two elements of paired marker traits were in no case independent of one another. The product moment correlation was then computed for this table and yielded a coefficient of $r=.65$. Assuming linearity for the relationship expressed by the obtained correlation coefficient, a causal interpretation then became possible, by means of the variance estimate of $r^2=.4283$, according to which 42.83 per cent of the scored deviations among one group are explained by deviations among the other group. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2

FREQUENCY COMPARISON BY MATCHED CATEGORIES OF BRAHMIN AND NON-BRAHMIN SCORES

Non-Brahmin		Brahmin	
Marker Traits	Scores	Marker Traits	Scores
-ede	178	ayti	22
-oLage	217	-aaga	94
-likke	140	-aak	8
-oo	23	-aa	14
kuut-	60	kunt-	45
koo-	11	kont-	2
Other	285	Other	70
Total	914	Total	255

The assumption is probable that it is the Brahmin group which exerts linguistic influence on the non-Brahmin, and this is supported by a significant positive association, of the order of P=.0129 by the chi square test, between a high number of scored deviations in non-Brahmin texts and the residence of those non-Brahmins in the Brahmin ward of Malmaddi. (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3

ASSOCIATION OF NON-BRAHMIN DEVIATION SCORES WITH RESIDENCE IN A BRAHMIN WARD
(38 Respondents)

	Below Mean	Above Mean
Resident in Brahman Ward	1	5
Non-resident in Brahman Ward	25	7

The computation of a second product moment correlation from the scores in a 2 by 7 table matching Malmaddi Brahmins and Malmaddi non-Brahmins yielded a coefficient of $\underline{r}$=.52. This allows the statement that, if linearity is assumed as before, and if $\underline{r}^2$=.28, then two-thirds of the explained deviations are attributable to Brahmin influence on non-Brahmin residents in (this) one ward, and one-third to Brahmin influence elsewhere. (See Table 4).

It appears that the mechanism by which Brahmins induce linguistic deviation among non-Brahmins, and therewith also effect variability in the dialects of members of other castes--especially those living in most intimate contact with them--is most commonly through openly correcting the speech of their own children. Those marker traits most often

TABLE 4

FREQUENCY COMPARISON BY MATCHED CATEGORIES OF BRAHMIN AND NON-BRAHMIN SCORES FOR RESIDENTS IN A BRAHMIN WARD
(6 Brahmin and 6 Non-Brahmin Respondents)

Non-Brahmin		Brahmin	
Marker Traits	Scores	Marker Traits	Scores
-ede	126	-ayti	1
-oLage	108	-aaga	32
-likke	62	-aak	0
-oo	9	-aa	6
kuut-	24	kunt-	1
koo-	4	kont-	0
Other	103	Other	31
Total	436	Total	71

corrected are thereby made known to non-Brahmins, who then adopt them in conscious imitation of the prestigeful Brahmins. The previous discussion by this author (McCormack, 1960) showed status dialects to be a matter of conscious inculcation and imitation, so that the present interpretation can be seen as essentially a case in point. However, a minor addendum emerges from the present study, which shows the most deviant speaker from the Brahmin group to be a recent (eight years) immigrant from Karwar District. This suggests that another model for non-Brahmin imitation may be provided by corrections tendered to immigrant Brahmins as they adjust to the locally dominant prestige dialect.[4] Apparently the habit of imitating local high-status dialects makes low-status speakers altogether more receptive to linguistic influences, including influences from other regional dialects, and this last feature has been noted for caste dialects in North India as well (Levine, 1959, p. 150; Gumperz, 1958).

It deserves emphasis that the observations of the North Indian situation, which have concentrated on linguistic changes among lower-status groups, are complementary with Bright's observation of the greater conservatism of a high-status group of Kannada speakers. That is, a group's conservatism is instructively definable as relative to more rapid change within other segments of its own local society.

Studies of caste dialects have proceeded so far, then, as to indicate that Indian speech communities are conscious of caste dialects, that linguistic forms diffuse more rapidly among lower-status groups, that the speech of lower-status groups displays forms with wider regional dispersion than does the speech of locally high-status castes, and, finally, that the motivation (the cause) for the existence of caste dialects is provided by the social-status aspects of the local caste hierarchy itself.

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[4]It is logical to find that the speech of the immigrant Brahmin most closely approximates the local non-Brahmin speech, since the speech of the latter, being less conservative, contains forms of wider regional dispersion. The data for this last point, as regards Kannada, is presented in Table 1.

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